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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the growth in services of Recording for the Blind, an organization supplying blind and other print-handicapped persons with free, taped educational books in cassette form. Increased acquisition at all age levels and expansion of computer capabilities to create an online subject catalog to the materials are noted. Details of planning procedures for the online catalog are given, as are current operating procedures and staffing functions (the staff grew to four professional librarians). Training and practice in subject searching is described. Five steps involved in subject searching- from initial contact with the reference librarian to collecting book references for the patron- are summarized. (CL)

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Recording for the Blind's Catalog Conversion for Online Searching

by Anne Parkison, Director of Library Services, Recording for the Blind

Recording for the Blind, Inc. (RFB) is a national, non-profit organization which supplies blind and print-handicapped students at all academic levels with free, taped educational books in cassette form. RFB's service is also available to registered borrowers who have completed their formal education but need information related to their chosen profession or occupation. Services are provided directly to the borrower; RFB does not participate in inter-library loan activities. Each borrower registers with RFB by completing an Application for Service which includes a disability statement.

RFB was initially founded to provide free recorded textbooks to blind veterans attending college. In 1948, Mrs. Anne Macdonald, RFB's founder and still active supporter, organized a committee including some members of the Women's Council of the New York Public Library. The first textbooks were recorded that year in a branch of the New York Public Library. The recordings were produced on 6" vinylite plastic disks, which accommodated up to 12 minutes of recorded material per side. In contrast, the 4-track cassettes used today accommodate up to four hours of recorded material. In 1951, $800 was donated for the purchase of RFB's first sound-proof recording booth. The founding committee was incorporated that year as the National Committee for Recording for the Blind.

By 1953, seven recording studios had been set up in Phoenix, Denver, Chicago, Los Angles, Oak Ridge, Tennesee, Athens, Georgia, and Louisville, Kentucky. The name of the organization was changed that year to Recording for the Blind, Inc.

Today, all books are recorded on tape and distributed in cassette form. The tapes are housed at headquarters in New York City and constitute RFB's Master Tape Library. When a borrower requests a book, a copy is run from the master tape onto 4-track cassettes. The loan period is one year and books may be renewed.

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The number of recording studios has grown from seven in 1953 to twenty-eight in 1983. There are over 5,000 volunteers who donate at least two hours per week of their time to recording or monitoring recording sessions. The process of recording a book requires the presence of two people. The "reader" reads the text aloud while the "monitor" reads along silently to ensure that the text is read accurately. In addition to checking for omissions of words and proper pronounciation, the monitor also runs the recording equipment.

The volunteers are required to have expertise in the subject areas for which they read or monitor. For example, foreign language books readers must be native speakers. Computer books are only read by people trained and working with computer systems. Potential readers must pass a voice test before they are permitted to read. The voice tests are evaluated by committees with expertise in the subject area being read. This procedure helps ensure the quality of RFB's recorded books.

RFB's current collection of recorded books, the Master Tape Library, contains approximately 60,000 titles. About 80% of this collection has been acquired as a result of borrower requests for recording specific titles. All registered borrowers may request that a needed book be recorded if it is not already in the Master Tape Library. The borrower supplies two printed copies of the book he needs - one for the reader and one for the monitor. RFB reimburses the borrower for one copy of the book. The other 20% of the collection has been acquired over the years as a result of RFB staff recommendations. Since 1981, these recommendations have been the responsibility of the Library Services Department staff.

About 7,000 titles (roughly 14% of the collection) are elementary and secondary school books. The remainder of the titles represent primarily undergraduate texts and supplementary reading materials. In recent years, RFB has been recording more and more specialized material of interest to graduate school students and professionals, especially in

disciplines like law, counseling, and education. Excluding young peoples' books, RFB's collection consists of 18% science, 47% humanities, and 35% social science titles.

For a long time, RFB thought of itself simply as a recording agency which stored copies of its recordings for use by registered borrowers. RFB did not see itself as a library and had no staff to provide individualized information services. In the middle 1970s, RFB began discussing the value of adding full-time, trained library staff to its organization. They also discussed the possibility of creating an online data base of RFB holdings. These discussions led eventually to two separate computer systems. RFB's in-house computer, which began operating in May 1980, is a Hewlett-Packard 3000. Its primary functions are to monitor production and circulation of books. Bibliographic information in this data base consists of author, title, publisher, copyright date, and abbreviated Dewey classification number. Subject headings and added entries typical of library records are not included. The second computer system holding RFB records is the Bibliographic Retrieval Service (BRS) system. RFB's efforts to create an online data base accessible by subject is the focal point of this presentation.

RFB felt that academic students and professionals were greatly hindered by the lack of subject access to recorded books. Blind students could obtain printed bibliographies from libraries just as sighted students could. Most often, these students had a sighted person to read such bibliographies. But lists of books in print are of little use unless readers are available to the user. Bibliographies of recorded books were few and not particularly current. RFB's printed catalog is, for example, issued every three years with annual supplements. There can be as many as 4000 titles (the number of books recorded each year) which are not included.

Discussions about how to overcome the lack of subject access to RFB's recorded books were held with people outside RFB, especially the Council on Library Resources and the National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the Library of Congress. NLS was in the

process of converting its holdings and those of its network libraries for online searching. The data base created was being stored by BRS in a private file. RFB and NLS agreed to cooperate to create a joint data base which would be accessible to all borrowers of both organizations.

In March 1979, RFB submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund a project to create a "subject enhanced, online catalog." It was understood that the project would be undertaken with close cooperation between Recording for the Blind and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The proposal outlined several tasks to be undertaken.

First, RFB's entire collection would be cataloged using MARC format. In addition to standard bibliographic information, each book record would, whenever possible, include an annotation or table of contents or both. This information would provide an increased number of more specific subject search terms than would be available from titles and Library of Congress subject headings.

Second, RFB records would be merged with those of NLS and its network libraries to produce an online union catalog representing the largest holdings of taped books in the country.

Third, RFB would utilize an online retrieval system capable of searching all significant words in each book record. Librarians would be hired to perform subject searches for borrowers doing research related to their studies or their professional work.

Fourth, RFB's printed catalog would be produced from the MARC format records which provide more complete bibliographic information than the previous catalogs.

Fifth, RFB would modify its collection development policy to upgrade the collection as an academic research facility. For many years books recommended by staff for recording were selected on the basis of their interest to the adult reader. Many of these books are classics and well-known titles in literature, history, and biography. A file had been kept of books requested by borrowers but which had not been sent in for recording. In the late 1960s, it was decided to use this file as a guide to book selection. Until 1979, however, no provision was made for book selection based on academic disciplines.

The National Endowment for the Humanities approved the grant in June 1979. NEH was to provide about 20% of the total funds deemed necessary to complete the project. Private foundations were expected to provide the remaining money. A major fund raising campaign was undertaken. Foundations which have contributed to date are the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, the J.N. Pew Charitable Trust (administered by the Glenmede Trust Company), the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Exxon Education Foundation, and the Charles E. Merrill Trust.

RFB continued to meet with outside resource people to establish time tables, staff needs, and mechanisms by which MARC format records could be created. Each of these was considered in terms of NLS's requirements. Notable among these resource people were Kurt Cylke, Allen Deschere, and Pat Hatlen at NLS; George Parsons and Paul Lagueux from the Council on Library Resources; Mike Malinconico from the New York Public Library, and Sal Costabile of Costabile Associates, Inc.

By May 1980, RFB had decided to hire Costabile Associates, Inc., a library consulting firm located in Bethesda, Maryland, to catalog the retrospective collection and to act as liason with NLS in Washington. Cataloging of new books received for recording would be done by library staff hired as permanent staff in New York.

Several methods of creating MARC format records were under consideration when RFB's first full-time librarian began work in June 1980. This librarian, Ms. Madeline Cohen, came into a project filled with hopes and ideas and a multitude of decisions to be made. Much credit is due to this person for organizing all the people, resources, and ideas into a feasible plan of action.

Consideration was given to using different methods of creating MARC records for the retrospective collection and for new books received for recording. One of several discarded ideas was for Costabile Associates to use an automated data base for its cataloging while RFB staff used Cataloging-in-Print data to create records for the new books. Worksheets would be filled out for NLS staff who would input cataloging data directly into NLS's computer. Another eventually discarded idea was for Costabile Associates to begin on its system while the New York staff waited for the anticipated MARC file to appear on BRS. The three systems given most consideration were the Online Center for Library Cataloging (OCLC), Informatics' Mini-Marc system, and the New York Public Library's Onlicats system. The Mini-marc system and the Onlicats system were especially attractive for a single operation in New York, but they were not practical for a project operating in two locations (New York and Bethesda).

OCLC became the final choice as the source of cataloging data and the means of creating MARC format records. The determining factors were these: 1. The OCLC database was expected to contain the greatest number of records for RFB titles. 2. Two staffs could use the system with equal ease. 3. OCLC was the least expensive system available.

One thing OCLC did not provide was a MARC format acceptable to NLS's computer. A conversion program was written to convert the monthly OCLC archive tapes to the Library of Congress internal MARC format. After the tapes are converted, RFB's records can be merged with NLS's to produce the microfiche and online catalogs.

Procedures still in use today were developed for handling the retrospective titles. RFB library staff request a printout from the Hewlett-Packard 3000 computer (RFB's inhouse computer). The format and type of bibliographic data appearing on the printout were determined by library staff. Bibliographic information consists of main entry, title, publisher, copyright date, shelf number, and series, if appropriate. Entries are arranged alphabetically by main entry within Dewey classification number groups like 500 to 509. Library staff mark books for cancellation and occasionally select books for acquisition in cases where multi-volume sets are found to be incomplete. Cancellation designations are transferred to a second copy of the printout which is mailed to Costabile Associates.

Many entries in the Hewlett-Packard data base are incomplete or need to be corrected as a result of problems encountered when that computer system was first put up. One staff member edits the printout information using RFB's printed catalog as the authority. If there are questions about an entry, OCLC and Books in Print are used to either verify information or to correct information. This work will be completed by July 1983. The printout is then compared to the titles in Books for College Libraries and Opening Day Collection. This check gives the library staff an idea of the quality of the collection. Books are selected for recording to fill gaps found in the collection.

When a printout is received at Costabile Associates office, staff search for annotations. Only sources for which copyright permission has been obtained are used. Some annotations are borrowed from NLS's cataloging records. About 35% of the titles CAI has cataloged have annotations appended to their records. Titles are then searched in the OCLC data base and records found are printed off. Rather than edit records online, staff use the printoffs as worksheets. Separate blocks of time can be set aside for searching records and for inputting edited records. The printouts also serve as a backup source of data in case records are lost or are found later to need correcting. Data unique to RFB records is added: shelf number, number of cassettes, and annotation if available.

Records are input at a rate of 1000 to 1200 per month. No catalog cards are produced. Titles for which no record is found are sent back to New York for original cataloging.

To help catalogers determine what addition, deletions, and changes should be made to OCLC records, Costabile Associates developed an editing manual. The manual was based on NLS's editing manual, and provided instructions on handling cataloging requirements imposed by NLS and by OCLC. The manual has been revised and expanded by RFB librarians to reflect patterns of cataloging developed over the last two years. For example, we add the floating subdivision "Study and teaching" to our juvenile textbooks to distinguish these from monographs on the same subject.

The first OCLC archive tape of RFB records was produced in October 1980. It contained 67 records of titles in the retrospective collection. It also served as the test tape for the conversion program, which required some modification.

RFB's first cataloger (and second full-time librarian) began work in December 1980. In addition to preparing printouts for Costabile Associates, she set up procedures for handling new books received for recording. The date established to separate the retrospective collection from new books to be cataloged was July 1, 1981. All titles which were in the Master Tape Library as of June 30, 1981 were to be cataloged by Costabile Associates. All books added to the Master Tape Library after July 1, 1981 were to be cataloged by the permanent library staff in New York.

The monthly OCLC archive tape contains records cataloged by both New York staff and Costabile Associates. When NLS receives the converted monthly tape, staff of the Bibliographic Control Section of NLS review all RFB records. Mistakes found are corrected before the records are added to the union catalogs. Particular attention is paid to proper form of main entry, outdated Library of Congress subject headings, and misspellings of significant words which could be used as subject search terms. This kind of authority work consumes many hours of NLS staff time, but is invaluable

for RFB and all borrowers of RFB and NLS recorded books.

An OCLC terminal was installed at RFB headquarters in New York in the spring of 1981. Searching and cataloging began in June 1981. The procedure for cataloging new books received is as follows. Books sent in by borrowers for recording are received by the Unit Relations Department. This department is responsible for assigning books to the 28 studios for recording. Unit Relations staff check their files to make sure newly received books have not already been recorded. If they have, the printed books are returned to the borrower. If they have not, a partial entry is made in the Hewlett-Packard computer.

The books are then given to the Library Services Department for searching and cataloging. Book titles are searched on OCLC and printed off as found. Copies are made of the title page and verso, the table of contents, and any introductory material that may be useful for creating annotations. The copies serve two purposes: they provide verification of bibliographic information when the printed book is no longer available and they permit adding the table of contents and annotations online.

Additions, deletions and changes are then made to the OCLC printed-off record. Book records cannot be input until a shelf number has been assigned to the completely recorded books. There can be a six-week to six-month delay between the time a book is cataloged and the time the recording is finished. Cataloging is done as quickly as possible while the printed book is available, but records are not added to the OCLC data base until later.

Books are returned to Unit Relations, whose staff assign them for recording and who enter additional bibliographic data into the H-P computer. As soon as these entries are made, the books can be ordered by any registered borrower.

For the first one and a half years, books for which no record was found in OCLC were set aside to be researched at a later time. Some records were found on a later search, but very few. As a result, these titles are now cataloged while the printed book is available and are entered into the OCLC data base as new records.

In November 1981 a reference librarian was hired to develop the subject searching aspect of the project. Because there were so few records in the online catalog at that time and because there was an obvious need for additional cataloging personnel, the reference librarian worked half-time with reference and half-time with cataloging. Staff shortages at NLS had caused a backlog in the authority work with the result that fewer than 5,000 records were online. Early estimates of how many records a cataloger could complete proved to be much too high. Despite limited time available, the reference librarian did produce the first draft of a collection development policy. Procedures for subject searching were outlined.

In the spring of 1982, discussions were held about the possibility of putting up a separate RFB file on BRS. The difference in numbers between records cataloged and records appearing online in the joint data base was growing larger. To ensure adherence to the terms of the original grant proposal, it was deemed necessary to speed up the subject searching aspect of the project. RFB contracted a separate online file with BRS in June 1982. It was anticipated that such a file would be available in September 1982. Unfortunately, that file is not yet ready. It is hoped that the file will be available by June 1983. At that time there should be about 37,000 titles in the file.

By June 1982, RFB Library Services Department staff had grown to four professional librarians: two catalogers, one reference librarian, and the Director. All four librarians do cataloging when necessary. The months of June through September are the busiest of the year. About half of the new books received for recording each year are processed during these four months. The director acts as the backup for the reference librarian for purposes of doing subject searching.

Training and practice for subject searching began in the summer of 1982. RFB decided to move slowly in announcing the availability of online subject searching for two major reasons: 1. Uncertainty about the number of requests which might be received and the ability of one librarian to handle a large number of them. 2. The number of RFB records in the joint data base was growing very slowly and represented a small number of subject areas.

By November 1982, there were about 9,000 RFB records in the online ion catalog, most of which were history, science, and technology titles. Letters were sent to academic and professional borrowers in the New York City metropolitan area announcing the availability of online searching. We made the assumption that most potential users of online subject searching would be academic students or professionals. We chose the New York City area as a trial site because local telephone calls could be used for communicating with requestors. Response to this mailing was disappointing but interaction with borrowers did help us tighten procedures and revise workforms and letters explaining the subject search system.

By March 1983, we were confident about our procedures and BRS's ability to have our file ready very soon. We sent 2000 letters to academic and professional borrowers in the states of New York, New Jersey, and Ohio. Response to this mailing has been quite exciting. Requests have come from 36 individual borrowers and from four agencies serving RFB borrowers. A total of 65 search topics have been handled (some borrowers had multiple requests). Among the requestors were 13 undergraduates, five graduate students, 14 professionals, five adults, and three high school or elementary students.

Most of the requests could not be searched entirely online, since only 11,000 titles are in the data base. However, a combination of online and manual searching had been used in an attempt to produce the most complete results available at this time.

The procedure for subject searching used now involves several steps. 1. Borrowers needing to find information by subject contact the reference librarian by telephone or by mail. 2. A "reference interview" much like any face-to-face reference interview is held. The reference librarian uses a workform when taking down information. Borrowers are asked for the following information: a short description of the subject to be searched; level of difficulty of material which would be acceptable; synonyms, related phrases, and commonly used terms which describe the subject; names, events, and geographic localities which may be associated with the topic; what kind of material the borrower would like excluded (users frequently know more about what they don't want than what they do want); what authors and titles have already been consulted; are there any publication date restrictions. Letters announcing the subject search program included information about what kinds of questions would be asked of the borrower. Borrowers who received letters should be somewhat prepared for the reference interview.

3. The librarian develops a search strategy based on the borrower's information and the librarian's own knowledge of a given subject. Although the online union catalog is a private file, the boolian operators used with public BRS files are used to search RFB records - and, not, or, with, adjacent. The records are divided into typical BRS paragraphs including: BN - shelf number, ME - main entry, TI - title, IR - publication data, SH - Library of Congress subject headings, GN - general notes and table of contents, AN - annotation.

4. The search is performed online. If results are few or none, the librarian will search NLS's records and perform a manual search. Any books desired from NLS's collection must be ordered direct from NLS headquarters or one of the network libraries. Manual searching involves checking the Subject Guide to Books in Print and RFB's printed catalog. Titles found in the Subject Guide to BIP are checked against RFB holdings in the H-P computer. Searching the RFB printed catalog is cumbersome but produces results if one perserveres. Since titles are arranged by Dewey classification groups, the librarian can try to locate promising titles within these broad subject classes. Titles including the subject or

related to the subject being searched can be found. Books with less informative titles will be overlooked.

5. The librarian gathers together all book references and telephones the borrower. The borrower can order books at this time. If the borrower would like a list of books, or if the list is too long to discuss over the telephone, the librarian will send a list by mail. Some borrowers have requested that annotations appended to records be sent. Others prefer a brief list of ordering information: author, title, and shelf number. Books from these lists can then be ordered through the standard ordering process.

Records found in the online data base are printed out on two-part paper. If desired, one copy of these records will be sent to the requestor. The second copy is kept in case another borrower requests the same information. We have had three occasions to do this in the last month.

When BRS is ready to put up RFB's private file, we will send follow-up letters to borrowers announcing the availability of subject searching in a greater number of disciplines. Over 90% of RFB's adult collection will then be available online. The juvenile titles will be the last part of the collection to be added to the data base. We will gradually add numbers of borrowers to our list to receive information about the Subject Reference System. We hope to be able to announce that the Subject Reference System is fully operational next winter. Requests will be taken from any RFB registered borrower at that time.

A manual to help search RFB's data base is being written. When it is completed, it will be made available to people outside RFB who would like to search the data base. We hope that some of our recording studios will be able to install terminals so they can perform searches for borrowers in their geographic areas. We also would like to explore the possibility of academic libraries performing searches for RFB borrowers attending their colleges and universities. Librarians who would like to search RFB's private file should contact me. Those who would like to search the joint

(NLS - RFB) file should contact the Automated Systems Coordinator at the National Library Services/Division of the Blind and Physically Handicapped, 1291 Taylor Street/NW, Washington, D.C. 20542. Records in the joint data base are also available on microfiche which is issued quarterly by NLS. If you are interested in a subscrition to the microfiche, please contact me at RFB.

RFB has been very busy during the last five years planning and developing an online catalog capable of being searched by specific subjects. This kind of project requires creative thinking, dedication, time, and money. We are grateful to all the resource people and foundations who have supported our effort. We at RFB are convinced this tremendous effort is worthwhile.

By June 1984, RFB's entire collection will be online, a new printed catalog will be available, and the Subject Reference System will be in full operation. Our registered borrowers will have a service never before available. If this helpsin their studies and their work, our goal will have been achieved.

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